Review of Gaṇeśapurāṇa: Part II: Krīḍakhaṇḍa. Translation, Notes and Index by Greg Bailey. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008

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Asiatische Studien
Études Asiatiques
LXV · 1 · 2011

Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft
Revue de la Société Suisse – Asie

Peter Lang
Bern · Berlin · Bruxelles · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Oxford · Wien

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REZENSIONEN / COMPTES RENDUS / REVIEWS

Gaṇeśapurāṇa : Part II : Krīḍakhaṇḍa. Translation, Notes and Index by Greg BAILEY. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008 (Purāṇa Research Publications Tübingen ; vol. 4, part II), xvi, 693 p.; ISBN 978-3-412-20202-6.

Though only the second volume of this impressive achievement was offered for review, one cannot but review it as continuation and completion of volume one[1]. Parts I and II complement each other and reading them means reviewing 20 years of scholarly input and publication history (cf. vol. 2, p. xiii). This review concentrates on Greg Bailey's (GB) work, his intentions and results; it will thus only indirectly concern the Gaṇeśapurāṇa (GnP) and its mythological content, literary qualities, etc.

Each volume contains an introduction, the translation, notes, appendices, bibliography and index, i.e., more than 500 pages of translation vs. almost 700 pages of additional matter. These proportions unambiguously characterize Bailey's work as a major contribution to purāṇa *research* and they establish that translating achieves not "just a translation" (as some – funding agencies included – like to downgrade translation projects) but is an integral and important aspect of philology. That this aspect is attributed its place in the series may be taken as a programmatic policy statement and encouragement concerning what purāṇa research is and should be.

The introductions to both volumes document that GB's analytic perspective aims at conceptualisation and analysis on a quite abstract level. He is interested in describing "purāṇa" and "myth" (singular) as structural, conceptual entities which underlie the thinking and literary conventions of the authors and their audience. What can be empirically described in the individual purāṇa or mythical story is explained with reference to this conceptual matrix. Some of the subtitles from the introduction to vol. 1 illustrate this perspective: "2 The Purāṇa as a Complete Narrative Unit"; "3 The Constituent Elements of the Purāṇa"; "5 The Dialogic Style of the Purāṇas"; "6 Systems of Temporality in the Purāṇic Narrative"; "7

1 See also: *Gaṇeśapurāṇa: Part I: Upāsanākhaṇḍa*. Introduction, Translation, Notes and Index by Greg BAILEY. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995 (Purāṇa Research Publications Tübingen ; vol. 4, part I), xv, 639 p.

Mythic and Didactic"; but eventually: "8 The Idiosyncratic Nature of the *Gaṇeśa Purāṇa*"; which is further specified and narrowed down to observations which characterise its first part, the *Upāsanākhaṇḍa* (sections 9 to 12). Historical questions (intertextuality, dating, place of composition) are dealt with in the introduction to vol. 2.

The introduction to vol. 2 has nine sections aiming at (as its title has it) "an historical and literary contextualising" of the GnP. The literary analysis (sections 1–6) concerns mainly the *Krīḍākhaṇḍa*. The focus of GB's analyses are "thematic frames" and "narrative units". Thus, he pays considerable attention to the organisation of the text. The yuga scheme and the avatāra scheme are most important as frames. "Avatāra myth" is used in singular in such contexts and is a conceptualisation of a structural characteristic of different texts and myths.

Section 6 distinguishes three types of myths, abstracting "the myth" (singular) of demon killing, of the status of the devotee, and theological myths. For the generally presupposed "bhakti myth" one is referred to its treatment in GB's analysis of the Vāmanapurāṇa. In the introduction to vol. 1 "Bhakti" is dealt with as one of three "semantic systems" (*karmavipāka* and *Gaṇeśa's family relations* being the other two).

It is difficult to verify, whether all the myths listed in the appendix are covered by these typologies. Appendix 2 (of vol. 2) lists 74 identified myths, but does not refer to the typology. The outline of the *Upāsanākhaṇḍa* as represented in Appendix 3 of vol. 1 shows many more "embedded myths" and is interspersed with "didactic units". For both parts it can be asked how the typology of myths relates to the analysis of narrative units or to other literary categories. Such questions are not answered in the introduction and cannot be answered by a reader who at this point has not yet read the translation. Is the typology meant to guide and direct the reader's interest? What could be its research potential (beyond the evident utility for describing and classifying what is there in the text)?

Historical analysis (sections 7–9) is methodologically approached as a case of intertextuality. Influences from the ViP and the BhP concentrate on the Kṛṣṇacarita but are difficult to pinpoint beyond attributing them to a general knowledge of Sanskrit literature and of the purāṇic genre.

The attempt to date the GnP starts from a survey of already proposed datings and their arguments but does not conclusively advance beyond the three hundred year period (1100–1400) proposed by Hazra (p. 79). Similarly, the location of the text's composition cannot be determined for lack of external evidence. Internal evidence points "to the centrality of the Deccan and its interior" (p. 82). The brevity of the description of the *kaliyuga* (the reciters' and

the hearers' or readers' present) counteracts any expectation of being given information about an empirical, verifiable world. That so little can be found about places or circumstances which could help to identify the provenance of the text might even be seen as result of a literary intention.

The GnP as a whole is characterised as a comprehensive set of narratives with theological aim. GB is convinced that the text contains a "theological system" (vol. 2, p. 38). "The blending of devotional theology and Vedantic philosophy is being taught to the devotee all the while the text being delivered." (p. 3) GB assumes that writing this purāṇa was a playful activity; which makes reading also "amusing and enjoyable". This observation is extrapolated from the concept of a divine *līlā* "as object of a literary meditation".

Description and analysis work preferably with keywords, some of which are raised to the status of technical terms. *Līlā*, *māyā*, *adbhuta*, *viyoga* are identified as the four terms to be analysed (p. 38–44) to explicate the theology underlying the devotion exemplified and taught in the GnP. (However, *māyā* is only briefly mentioned on the following pages, *viyoga* is omitted altogether. *Bhakti* might be added since it forms the background to the other terms.)

Motifs (e.g., the section on the severed head) *are* referenced on the vocabulary level (e.g., the remark on the occurrence of "elephant"), but without the claim to completeness and without the ambition to have analysed the vocabulary of the text in a systematic manner. (Indexes and concordances of the Sanskrit text cannot be part of the translation – though they are certainly useful tools to any translator – a remark obviously provoked by the publication of the book in the Purāṇa Research Publication series. This translation adds an important, yet independent aspect to the programmatic scope of purāṇa research that defines the series and the project from which the series originated.)

The use of untranslated (italicised) words in the introduction (e.g. – in vol. 2 –, *līlā, māyā, avatāra, bhakti, dharma, anukramaṇika, bālacarita, khaṇḍa, stotra, saṃskāra, gaṇa, svabhāva, svarūpa, yuga, saguṇa, nirguṇa, darśana, adbhuta, āścarya, prakṛti, śakti, jñāna, viśvarūpa, viyoga, trimūrti*) raises the question which type of reader GB could have intended if all of these words are presupposed as familiar. To explain them all would almost amount to an introduction to Hinduism. Yet, this use of Sanskrit words in the introduction is rarely unavoidable or necessary (e.g., "The idea of Gaṇeśa as *nirguṇa* is a common theme in many of the *stotras* which occur in both *khaṇḍas*." p. 14). One would have hoped that such a translation be addressed also to historians of religion, or to researchers on tales, myths, symbols, comparative literature (etc.) who do perhaps *not* know all of the source languages they encounter. If it is implied that

they *should* know them, the postulate deserves support, but might be unrealistic and therefore impede the reception of the book.

The translation is consistent and readable because GB evidently masters his Sanskrit and his English and he has reflected (in independent publications) about translating as a trans-cultural activity. As in any translation decisions had to be taken. And one can find points where alternatives offer themselves. But GB has documented variant readings (appendix), uncertain translations or alternative understandings (notes), gives the textual references (for every verse, in the margin), and his translation provides a solid and reliable base for any further use, analysis and exegesis of the GnP.

Reading the GnP *after* having studied the introduction means to be equipped with a helpful toolbox. Yet, the text can be analysed also with other questions in mind and described with other categories or searched for information about many an aspect of the religious, mythological, social, ritual, etc., milieu which produced it. The conceptual scope of interpretative frames apart, to have made such further use of the GnP possible and to stimulate it is certainly an additional, possibly even the most lasting and influential merit of this translation.

The endnotes (to each chapter, p. 416–626 in vol. 2) always begin with explanatory notes to individual verses. The fact that a verse is annotated is in no way marked in the translation. Which items are selected for commentary does not seem predictable and is definitely very selective. The, generally longer, second sections of the notes to each chapter (called "concluding notes") are structured by topical catchwords, number and subtitles varying according to the requirements of each chapter. They normally concern the narrative analysis (introduction, plot, narrative unit). The focus of literary observations lies on narrative skill, cohesion (transitions, tension, – the latter an element of reader reaction), symmetry.

The points, problems, or questions treated in the notes repeat themselves and are typical for Bailey's research perspective as applied to the variety of texts (represented by the chapters). I list a few of them, many of them being indicated by subtitles:

narrative perspective
introduction (transitions between chapters)
plot, narrative structure
conclusion
theology/Śiva/Viṣṇu
temporality
source (intertextuality, parallels)

narrative units and myth notations
frames of interlocution, dialogical units
theological lessons/message (relation between divinities)
problematic translations
factual explanations, cultural knowledge (occasional)

Punctuating the reading of the translation by reading the notes chapter by chapter, with their narrative logical priorities and analytical remarks (and perhaps with one's own observations and questions in mind which may be different from the ones addressed by GB) results in a complex, multi-layered reading experience. (Perhaps one would come closer to the originally intended mode of reception if one would appropriate one chapter per day as if one were attending a public recitation.) Reading GB's work is something like a practical in Purāṇa research. The richest possible range of interdisciplinary reception would do GB's immense input and perseverance the honour which it deserves.

As a product of the art of bookmaking the volume shows signs of a certain lack of attention to detail or just of a missed round of professional advice and proofreading by the publisher's editors (use of quotation marks and their emboxing, missing signs of punctuation, hyphenation) – fortunately not too many, but enough to be irritating. The abbreviations for texts do not all conform to those used in the Epic and Purāṇic Bibliography (vol. 3 of the series). The use of a closing period with abbreviations (e.g., ViP., ṚV.) seems idiosyncratic. Some abbreviations are missing; and the sorting of the list stumbles occasionally. The bibliographies in the two volumes partly repeat, partly supplement each other. For a series that grew out of a (at that time perhaps pioneering) project of computerizing purāṇas it is regrettable to state that (given the developments since) the publication does not seem to support "open access" or to have anticipated its availability in electronic form.

Is Greg Bailey's scholarship representative of (contemporary) purāṇa research and exemplary for the future? He appears to me as a true paurāṇika, a learned person with literary taste and appreciation and the perseverance that enjoys confronting the challenge posed by size and extent (thousands of verses and hundreds of chapters and scores of purāṇas and the cosmos and history of Indian thought, mythology, religious practice …), fascinated by comprehensive structures no less than colourful detail and the skills of presentation.

That a purāṇa (even an upapurāṇa) should find the analytic attention of someone like GB is fortuitous, even if the last word on any purāṇa cannot

probably ever have been spoken. It remains to be hoped that many a purāṇa may find the attention of many a Greg Bailey.

Peter Schreiner

Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness, ed. by Eli FRANCO, in collaboration with Dagmar EIGNER. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009. 8, 483 p. (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-Historische Klasse: Sitzungsberichte, 794. Band); ISBN 978-3-412-20202-6.

Edited volumes on a specific topic (often proceedings of conferences or workshops uniting the specialists of the chosen topic) are presumably read by few from beginning to end, apart from reviewers. *Their* evaluative priorities and critical acumen is likely to be determined by their own interests, research priorities and competence. It would not take *seventeen* contributors (in the case of the volume at hand) if any *one* person could master the general topic of "yogic perception, meditation and altered states of consciousness", taking into account the necessary knowledge of the sources (in this case from India, Tibet, Nepal, Europe, America, written in Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, … English, German …), the academic disciplines (psychology, psychotherapy, anthropology, physics, cosmology, philosophy, epistemology …) and their methods (philology, field work, psychological therapies … – none of these lists claims to be complete). Eli Franco (EF) as general editor surveys all of them while writing his introduction, thus looking at the whole from a position one step above the individual contributions. The reviewer who begins his reading with the introduction and consequently looks at the papers in its light and perspective is still one more step removed – not necessarily one step above, perhaps rather one step to the side.

EF seems to have an ambiguous attitude to the topic in claiming that "most scholars, myself included, are not looking at meditation as a source of knowledge of the external world" (p. 15), yet expecting that it "may tell us something new and significant about ourselves" – about the editor, or about scholars with meditative experiences, or about anthropological universals shared by yogis, shamans and people using drugs?

The major part of the introduction (p. 19–50) is devoted to summaries (extensive, 2–3 pages each), with more or less latent comments by the editor (footnotes, questions between dashes, cross-references, etc.); it is an interesting